

FĀYIZAH AL-WAKĪL, *Al-Shiwār: Jihāz al-‘Arūs fī Miṣr fī ‘Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk* (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat al-Sharq and Dār al-Wafā’, 2001). Pp. 543.

REVIEWED BY VANESSA DE GIFIS, University of Chicago.

In this book, al-Wakīl discusses the wedding trousseau in the Mamluk period. She sets out to describe the physical and design components of the trousseau and its surrounding ceremony; she then attempts to imagine the dynamics of the trousseau in its social and economic contexts. Al-Wakīl’s sources include contemporary historical accounts, secondary historical and art historical works, and trousseau lists, marriage documents, and artifacts housed in museums such as the Louvre, the Museum of Islamic Art, the Coptic Museum, and the Museum of the School of Archaeology at the University of Cairo. The end of the book contains transcripts of marriage documents and trousseau lists, descriptions of artifacts, and photographs (however, often unclear) of select items. One obvious omission in her bibliography of primary sources is al-Sakhāwī’s (831–902/1428–97) *Al-Ḍaw’ al-Lāmi’ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi’*, the last section of which is a collection of biographies of women contemporary to the author.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Wakīl originally conceived a broader scope for her study: initially to cover the Islamic period generally, and then both the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. Her final concentration on the Mamluk period still bears the signs of her broader outlook—particularly in her use of Ottoman material evidence to fill in the blanks of Mamluk artifacts, and in her comparison of Mamluk trousseau lists with those of earlier periods.

The comparative contextualization of the Mamluk situation in Islamic history leads her to conclude that the Mamluk trousseau was generally increasing in luxury over time, being more extravagant than its predecessors in pre-Mamluk times. Within the Mamluk period itself,<sup>2</sup> al-Wakīl identifies the economic peak in Cairo in the first half of the fourteenth century under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (p. 315). This economic peak, she asserts, means a corresponding peak in the quality of trousseaux. In her chapter entitled “The Trousseau in Light of Economic Life,” al-Wakīl argues for a direct correspondence between economic prosperity and the elaboration of the trousseau, assuming that both suppliers and consumers, given disposable wealth, will maximize luxury in production and acquisition respectively.

Al-Wakīl’s application of economic theory extends to her understanding of

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<sup>1</sup>See Huda Lutfi, “Al-Sakhāwī’s *Kitāb al-Nisā’* as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century A.D.,” *Muslim World* 71 (1981): 104-24.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. L. A. Mayer, “Costumes of Mamluk Women,” *Islamic Culture* 17 (1943): 303, who cites al-Maqrīzī in noting an increase in luxury from the Bahri to Circassian periods.



the varieties in trousseaux among different social classes, which she discusses in her chapter entitled "The Trousseau in Light of Social Life." She categorizes social groups according to their financial (specifically, spending) power. For those groups that rank highest in financial viability, such as the ruling military elite and merchants, she explains that their trousseaux will be more extravagant, while the trousseaux of the peasants will be more modest in proportion to their wealth.<sup>3</sup> In this way, she argues, the trousseau is a means to demonstrate one's wealth and social status. The idea of associating relative opulence of the trousseau according to social class is not original to al-Wakīl; Aḥmad 'Abd al-Rāziq says as much in *La Femme au Temps des Mamlouks en Egypte*.<sup>4</sup> Since most of the sources available to al-Wakīl for studying the trousseau pertain to the higher classes, her emphasis on the opulence of trousseaux is amplified. Despite this, she is mindful not to neglect hypothesizing on the characteristics of the more meager trousseaux that are not well documented in the historical or archival records.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, she provides several extraordinary examples of trousseaux, demonstrating her awareness that the matter did not absolutely conform to a simple class-based categorization of trousseaux.<sup>6</sup>

As for her typological study of the components of the trousseaux, al-Wakīl presumes that most household items, including furnishings and cookware, are acquired as part of a trousseau, as are jewelry, clothes, and cosmetics (p. 8).<sup>7</sup> Having accepted this probability, she organizes her typological presentation of these items into functional categories and stylistic subcategories. She includes brief explanations of production processes. Most of her book (over 300 pages) consists of these functional and stylistic descriptions of the components of the trousseaux. The portions of this descriptive section that deal with the origins of materials and designs and the methods of production enhance the economic dimension of al-Wakīl's thesis, particularly global trade (of both goods and ideas) and Egyptian marketplace activity.

Al-Wakīl's use of Ottoman material data in her study suggests that she considers the Mamluk period as a nearly indistinguishable part of a greater cultural continuity,

<sup>3</sup>She mentions also that the surrounding ceremonial aspects of marriage, including the procession of the trousseau, are similarly proportional to the wealth of the participants.

<sup>4</sup>Aḥmad 'Abd al-Rāziq, *La Femme au Temps des Mamlouks en Egypte* (Cairo, 1973), 140.

<sup>5</sup>Al-Wakīl's sources for the poorer classes are less often contemporary, consisting of later, sometimes Western, sources. Al-Maqrīzī is occasionally cited, such as in mentioning the overwhelming popularity of amber necklaces (sing. *qilādah*) among all groups of society (p. 435).

<sup>6</sup>For example, she notes several cases of upper-class trousseaux whose values were less than their class would theoretically suggest (p. 420).

<sup>7</sup>The jewelry, clothes, and cosmetics, she notes, would definitely be included when used in the wedding ceremony itself.



a view which may lead to some insensitivity in perceiving distinctive Mamluk qualities in trousseau furnishings. Nonetheless, she recognizes various stylistic variants in many categories of artifacts, which demonstrates her attention to intra-Mamluk diversity. Since the functions of furnishings and personal items do not change drastically from one political period to the next, al-Wakīl's use of Ottoman artifacts to help generally identify the components of the Mamluk trousseau is reasonable; she is aware that the specific decorative elements of these items are not to be as readily appropriated into our vision of the Mamluk character of trousseaux.

A valuable aspect of her study is her inclusion of the prices of some of the components of the trousseaux, as well as the amounts of dowries. In this way, she has gathered helpful data for reconstructing the monetary climate of the period. Although she does not explain matters such as the influences of inflation and devaluation on interpreting monetary rates, she does recognize various foreign and domestic policies involving market regulations and taxation, as well as the influence of other factors like famine and factional disputes on the security of the Mamluk economy.

Another enlightening point in al-Wakīl's book is how material and behavioral reality did not conform to principles of the shari'ah. For example, she notes that despite the legal prohibitions of gold kitchenware and ear and nose piercings, the popularity of these things are found frequently in material and documentary evidence. This reminds us of the importance of interpreting material and documentary evidence without straining to conciliate findings with the ideals presented in legal codes, and of recognizing the inaccuracy and inadequacy of legal codes in reconstructing an image of real life.

Perhaps the most important aspect, from the woman's perspective, pertaining to the value of the trousseau is absent from al-Wakīl's study: how the trousseau facilitated the woman's economic maneuverability, which in turn could have fostered social and intellectual independence. This would have been an intriguing and germane issue for her to have addressed. Other pertinent but neglected issues are marriage among relatives as a means to preserve wealth within the family,<sup>8</sup> and the relative rarity of marriage between different socioeconomic classes.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Although the evidence al-Wakīl presents on the familial sources of trousseau items demonstrates people's interest in circulating wealth within the family unit, she does not discuss marriages in which the bride and groom are actually closely related to each other.

<sup>9</sup>She does address the frequency of marriage between sultans' and amirs' families and the resulting similarity in the values of their trousseaux; however, the closeness in class between these two groups as contrasted with the difference between the princely class and the peasant class makes the frequency of the aforementioned marriages not surprising, whereas a marriage between members of the princely and peasant classes would be more remarkable examples of the use of the trousseau



Al-Wakīl's penultimate chapter, in which she attempts to analyze the decorative motifs evident in trousseaux, is more descriptive than analytical. She mainly focuses on identifying the stylistic variants of typical motifs, and recalls only general interpretations of the various symbols, which are abstracted from the context of the trousseau. The question of why these symbols are evoked in the particular circumstance of marriage is not answered. While the philosophical details may be better left to the scholars whose works are dedicated specifically to those issues (to whom she does refer in her footnotes), the absence of a substantial discussion speculating on the significance of the presence of these symbols in the trousseaux effectively reduces this penultimate chapter to a selective reorganization of her data, in which she presents some of the material evidence according to decorative criteria, rather than the functional categories that she employs in the preceding chapters.

The comprehensive scope of al-Wakīl's study of the trousseau and its cultural context is admirably ambitious. *Al-Shiwār* illuminates some of the connections between economic, social, and material patterns of culture and stimulates the reader to consider the material consequences of economic and social trends in light of the wedding ceremony and homemaking. It can be read in conjunction with other works that flesh out the more specific socioeconomic dynamics that comprise the milieu for the Mamluk trousseau. The annoyance of occasional typos and frustrating footnotes, in which she cites works incompletely in reference to earlier citations that are not immediately preceding the incomplete citation, should not distract the reader from appreciating the thoughtful work al-Wakīl presents.

YASSER TABBAA, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

REVIEWED BY NASSER RABBAT, MIT

The field of Islamic art and architectural history is among the least theoretically developed areas of both art history and Islamic history. Very few studies exist that move beyond the monographic or taxonomic framework on the one hand, or the religiously or culturally essentialist and generalizing on the other. This polarity of

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as an expression of class identification. Lutfi notes some of these rare instances in which a woman marries a man of a lower social class in "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisā'*," 113.



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approach reflects the two influences that dominated the development of the field in the last century. The first is the authoritative Western historiography of art history, which until recently delimited the possible scope and methods of all subfields, including Islamic art and architecture, and assigned them their proper place in a culturally and even ideologically stratified art historical hierarchy. This is a dignified scholarly tradition to be sure: it finds its roots in the nineteenth-century German and French history of art and archaeology. But it is a tradition in the Hobsbawmian sense nonetheless, that is, it forms the most powerful proclamation by which a project or a specialty can gain legitimization by association with an already established network of conventions that produce and use art historical knowledge.

The second influence comes from the peculiar historiography of the study of Islam in the West, that we came to call Orientalism, and its various peregrinations. The Orientalist tradition produced a fundamentally self-contained discourse, charting the evolution of Islamic art and architecture but not communicating their cultural variety or the interdependence between them and other cultures' art and architecture. Of particular relevance in this vein is a brand of Islamic esotericism which prospered in the 1970s and 1980s among a certain number of Western and Western-educated Muslim scholars. These scholars saw Islamic art and architecture primarily as symbolic manifestations of a transcendental and rather acultural and ahistorical Islam. This view promoted, and even demanded, comprehensive studies of art and architecture enframed within an essentialist vision that could not admit any form of cultural or historical criticism.

Thus the appearance of a thoroughly and critically historical study on Islamic art and architecture such as Yasser Tabbaa's *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival*, is a positively welcome event. Here we have a book that outwardly and almost harshly rejects the approaches delineated above and adopts a historical method which asserts that specific artistic forms acquired and disseminated distinct meanings primarily in relation to and in conjunction with their cultural, social, and ideological contexts. This deeply and strongly contextualizing framework gives the book its verve and underscores its palpable sense of purpose. It also endows it with remarkable coherence despite the otherwise selective character of its content, which focuses on particular artistic and architectural changes in the studied period and leaves some others out, notably the resurgence of figural representation.

With the publication of this book, Tabbaa deliberately chooses to belong to and complete a scholarly genealogy of sorts. He situates his book historically, discursively, and methodologically between two influential treatises: Oleg Grabar's *The Formation of Islamic Art* (1973, 1987 2d ed.) and Gulru Necipoglu's *The Topkapi Scroll : Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (1995). The



former, which deals with Umayyad and early Abbasid art, was a pioneering study that formed the foundation upon which most historical interpretations in the field have depended until now. The latter, which marked the forceful reintroduction of theory about Islamic ornamental modes abandoned since Ernest Diez's 1930s stylistic studies, focuses primarily on the Timurid and post-Timurid art since the fourteenth century. Tabbaa's *Transformation of Islamic Art* fits snugly in the historical space left between Grabar's and Necipoglu's timeframes. The book spans the ostensible trajectory of a heterogeneous and historically ambivalent movement, the Sunni Revival, which may have defined the struggle that occupied the central Islamic world during the period between the rise of a traditionalist Ash'arism in the second half of the tenth century and the demise of the Isma'ili Fatimids in 1171. Tabbaa particularly centers his investigation of artistic transformations around the reign of Nur al-Din Mahmud ibn Zangi (1146-74), a period that he convincingly projects as the triumphant culmination of the Sunni Revival.

Tabbaa tries to do exactly what the title of his book implies: to catalog, explain, contextualize, and interpret a number of artistic transformations both in writing and in two- and three-dimensional ornamentation, that coincided with the Sunni Revival. After briefly introducing the historical, ideological, and political context of the Sunni Revival, he moves to discuss, in two tightly-knit chapters, the transformation of Arabic writing from the angular (generally known as Kufic) style to the proportioned cursive style first in Qur'anic writing and later in monumental inscriptions on buildings. He then takes on the intricate vegetal and geometric patterns, alternately named Arabesque and *giriḥ* by various scholars working from different vantage points, which he sees as having acquired potent religious meanings in the architectural works of the period. Lastly he tackles in two chapters the most important Islamic architectural innovation of the medieval Islamic world, the *muqarnas*, as well as five other stereotomic devices that appeared in the stone architecture of the various dynasties of Syria, Jazira, and Anatolia in the twelfth and thirteenth century. The brief conclusion sums up the driving forces of these artistic transformations—theology, politics, technology, and patronage—and insists on the symbolic role of the art as mediating between the vision of an idealist, ecumenical Islamic nation and the reality of a politically fragmented, though increasingly orthodox, medieval Islamic world.

Tabbaa argues that the timing of these transformations was not incidental. In fact, he ascribes the very reason of their occurrence to "the forces of the Sunni Revival." This is indeed a tall order. No cohesive body of textual evidence exists to prove it, or to disprove it for that matter. Tabbaa consequently ekes out of a multitude of disparate and incomplete documents—historical, theological, biographical, scientific, and of course the art itself—the contours of a coherent,





theologically and politically driven artistic movement, a movement that is otherwise never hinted at in the chronicles of the period. This is a formidable task, and Tabbaa succeeds brilliantly by sketching the historical circumstances surrounding the emergence and consolidation of a vigorous Sunnism in the central Islamic lands and its influence on the development of Arabic writing and monumental inscriptions as well as on the geometric "Arabesque" decoration. He is less convincing in his reading of Sunni and especially Ash'ari symbolic references in a number of architectural, decorative, and structural innovations —chief among them is the *muqarnas*. In this last case, the present reviewer finds two of Tabbaa's causative forces, the developing technology and competitive patronage, more fruitful venues for interpretation than either the theological or politics forces. In fact, for a study predicated on the exploration of the tension between political fragmentation and a unifying impulse, Tabbaa's book is short on examining the roles of the diverse Turkic and other small dynasties in the promotion and exploitation of the new artistic inventions.

Nevertheless, Tabbaa's main point, the need to historicize and contextualize art making in the medieval period independent of positivist or essentialist views of Islam and Islamic history, is forcefully validated throughout the book. Henceforth, it will be very difficult indeed to see in the *muqarnas* or the monumental inscriptions of the Zangids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, and other medieval Islamic dynasties, expressions of the spirit of Islam *tout court*. Art historians will have to pay more attention to changes, discontinuities, innovations, and other telltale details in the art instead of lumping them all together as additional manifestations of an overarching and unchanging Islamic vision of art, even when the art itself has specific religious or sectarian meanings.

Tabbaa's book also presents an effective reminder to Medieval Islamic historians to widen their investigative domains to encompass art and architecture. With the dearth of interpretable historic documents that often impede the study of medieval Islamic history, the inclusion of visual clues adds a new dimension of interpretation. Art and architecture complement other cultural expressions such as religious treatises, poetry, and legal texts, which have been explored by a small number of imaginative historians who have begun to sketch the mental structures of several classes of Muslims involved in the upheavals that changed the face of the medieval Islamic world. Visual documents in fact may be even more representative of collective mentalities than textual ones. They are public, more numerous, and their messages may have been more legible to the masses than literary or religious texts. More than any other cultural artifact, they can truly frame the historical and cultural characteristics of an era. Tabbaa's *Transformation of Islamic Art* is a forceful and creative case in point.



NABĪL MUḤAMMAD ‘ABD AL-‘AZĪZ, *Riyādat al-Ṣayd fī ‘Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Anglo al-Miṣrī, 1999). Pp. 256, illustrations.

REVIEWED BY NIALL CHRISTIE, University of British Columbia

Hunting was an important pursuit to the Mamluk sultans and their amirs, forming another of the branches of *furūsīyah*.<sup>1</sup> In this two-part work Nabīl Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz gives a portrayal of Mamluk hunting, dealing in turn with a wide variety of topics. He opens the first part, which considers hunting on land, with a discussion of what hunting was, followed by a treatment of the customary practices and manners of Mamluk hunters, both the rulers and the ordinary soldiers. He then describes the clothes worn on hunting expeditions, the officials and servants who accompanied the hunt, and the weapons and equipment used. There then follow chapters on birds and animals, dealing in each case with creatures both used for hunting and hunted, edible and otherwise, along with some consideration of their use as gifts or in trade. The second of these also includes some discussion of animals kept in menageries. The first section of the work ends with a long description of actual hunting expeditions engaged in by both the Mamluk sultans and their amirs.

The second, shorter part of the work discusses hunting in seas and rivers, and fishing in particular. This section, consisting of two chapters, begins with a consideration of the fishing grounds of Egypt and the *shām* region, and closes with a description of the various fish and other animals found in the rivers, lakes and seas of these countries. Several illustrations of hunters and animals follow. The work ends with a detailed bibliography and a contents page.

Nabīl Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s selection of sources is wide and thorough, but it is not surprising, given their variable nature, that he has relied on some works more than others. Al-Qalqashandī’s (d. 821/1418) chancery manual, *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā fī Ṣinā‘a al-Inshā’*, and al-Nuwayrī’s (d. 733/1333) encyclopedia, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, are among the works that feature particularly prominently. His major emphasis is on the evidence of primary sources, both in manuscript and published editions, although he has also made use of a relatively small amount of secondary literature in Arabic, French and English. References to the sources are rigorously footnoted, and occasional explanatory footnotes help to illuminate the text. However, this reviewer would have preferred to have seen more analysis of the sources. Too often the texts were allowed to speak for themselves, but the questions of how far the examples cited represented the normal practices of the period, and how far they had been idealized or otherwise altered by the writers

<sup>1</sup>David Ayalon, “Furusiyya (In the Mamluk State),” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 2:955.





who recorded them, were not fully addressed.

Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings Nabīl Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s work is still an important contribution to the field. It gives a detailed description of Mamluk hunting, as it is depicted in the sources from the period, and will be of great use as a resource for scholars interested in this noble pursuit.

SHAWQĪ ‘ABD AL-QAWĪ ‘UTHMĀN, *Al-Tijārah bayna Miṣr wa-Afrīqiyyā fī ‘Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk, 1250–1515 M, 648–922 H.* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-‘Alā lil-Thaqāfah, 2000). Pp. 161.

REVIEWED BY ADAM SABRA

Although this book has a promising title, it does not live up to that promise. The author, a professor of history at Cairo University, is the author of a previous study on the Indian Ocean trade and several studies on Egyptian folklore. Despite this background, however, the work under review fails to address the topic promised in its title in a scholarly or focused manner. This is doubly unfortunate since the field could use a good study of just this topic. The last overall study of Mamluk trade to cover the subject of Egypt’s foreign trade comprehensively is the well-known study by Ṣubḥī Labīb. More recent scholarship has generally focused on one or another aspect, primarily focusing on the Mediterranean or Indian Ocean. While Terry Walz has done a study of Egypt’s trade with Bilād al-Sūdān in the Ottoman period, we still lack a comprehensive treatment of the subject for the Mamluk period.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first deals with Egypt’s geographical position and the role of Arab and Muslim geographers in writing the history of the continent. The author is influenced by the Egyptian geographer Jamāl Ḥamdān and by Nasserist ideology in stressing Egypt’s three circles: Arab, Islamic, and African. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this view of Egypt’s identity, the author is primarily interested in emphasizing Egypt’s leading role in all three groups, rather than examining the interaction between them in a more open-minded manner. Furthermore, the author cites historical and geographical sources without any real concern for historical period or for the development of geographical literature as a genre. The latter subject has been studied in great detail by André Miquel and ‘Azīz al-‘Azmah, among others.

The lack of concern for historical period carries over into the second chapter, which deals with the spread of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa and its connection



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with trade. Again, despite the promising character of the subject, the author does not really go beyond existing accounts. Most of his material comes from an earlier period, and there is nothing new here. Unfortunately, the author's acquaintance with European language studies of African history (or Mamluk history for that matter) is limited. This is unfortunate, since much has been done in recent years, especially on the important, although sensitive, subject of the slave trade. The author's treatment of this all-important topic is confined to delimiting the Islamic legal teachings on the subject without any attempt to examine whether these teachings were actually followed or what effects this trade might have had on the societies of Sudanic Africa. Indeed, the author plays down the importance of this trade, saying that it is insignificant in comparison with the number of slaves taken by "the white man." At the same time, the author clearly subscribes to a view that attributes cultural superiority to Arab Muslims, and sees the conversion to Islam by black Africans as something natural. While Islam was no doubt attractive to many people in Bilād al-Sūdān, one requires a more sophisticated and less patronizing model of explanation to contextualize conversion.

Chapter three deals with different trade routes connecting Egypt with Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the information here is interesting, but it is taken from a group of primary and secondary sources without any sense of historical period. Material from the tenth century is indiscriminately mixed with material from the nineteenth century. Most of the material is simply paraphrased from travelogues without any real attempt at analysis. Nor is any effort made to reconstruct the West or East African role in most aspects of this commerce.

The fourth and final chapter deals with Egypt's role as a center of trade for African goods and the significance of this role for the Mamluk empire. Here one would expect that there would be considerable material of interest to the Mamluk historian. Unfortunately, however, the author, being unaware of most recent literature on his subject, misses this opportunity. For example, he argues that the rise of the Mongols endangered the land routes of trade from Asia. He is totally unaware of Janet Abu-Lughod's argument that it was the collapse of the Mongol imperium that led to Egypt's increased role in the trade between Asia and the Mediterranean world. Much more could have been said in this chapter about the role of West African gold in allowing the Mamluks to carry on trade with the Italian city states and the Catalans. Much of the remainder of the book deals with the Mamluk interest in the Red Sea trade, insofar as that required Mamluk influence in Upper Egypt and in East Africa. Here, it would have been helpful if the author had seen Jean-Claude Garçin's work on Qūṣ. The author does address the rise of the Portuguese empire, but in insufficient detail.

This book seems to have been intended as a textbook for Egyptian undergraduate students of history. Such a textbook would be a welcome addition, and might



have been used by scholars of the period as well, had it been more carefully thought out, better researched, and less defensively written. Unfortunately, this book will not fill the need for a solid work on its subject.

ANDRÉ RAYMOND, *Cairo: City of History*, tr. Willard Wood (Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 2001). Pp. 436

REVIEWED BY BERNARD O'KANE, The American University in Cairo

This is a translation of the author's *Le Caire*, originally published by Fayard in 1993. André Raymond has also published monographs on the major cities of the Arab world in the Ottoman period, and his early works such as *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle* (Damascus, 1974) and *Les marchés du Caire* (Cairo, 1979) established him as one of the foremost authorities on Ottoman and urban history. Anyone working on urban history should be aware of the pitfalls that Orientalists have dug for themselves, and as it was Raymond himself who has exposed many of their limitations<sup>1</sup> (e.g. straight lines good, crooked lines bad) it is reassuring to find him taking on this task.

It will come as no surprise then to learn that this is a masterful exposition of the topic by one thoroughly in command of the sources. Raymond has been a pioneer in the use, not just of texts, but of all the sources available to historians, including the enormously rich legacy of Cairene monuments and their epigraphy. The generous quotations of these interwoven throughout the text lend much to the flavour of the periods they describe, and are analysed in conjunction with social data that they provide.

For example, al-Ghawri's restoration of the old aqueduct is familiar to most visitors to Cairo from its monumental intake tower. Naturally one's first assumption is that it brought drinking water from the Nile to obviate the cost and inconvenience of transporting it in the normal way, by camel or donkey. Raymond shows how most of it instead went to irrigate the sultan's new garden at the Maydan below the citadel, filled with tress and plants imported, with their soil, from as far away as Syria.

The extensive material available for Mamluk history enables Raymond to provide separate histories of individual districts of the city. Among the topics

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<sup>1</sup>"Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1994):



considered are the problem of encroachments of houses and shops on the streets, and the flight of the elite from the center to the suburbs — cases of *plus ça change*... Raymond's earlier work on al-Maqrizi's account of markets is put to good use together with his knowledge of *waqfiyyas* to give us a vivid picture of contemporary mercantile life.

As one might expect, the Ottoman city is given substantial coverage, and the emphasis on the expansion of the city is a useful corrective to the widely-held earlier views of decline in this period. "City Administration and Daily Life" is appropriately given a separate chapter, in which the importance of the *waqf* institution is awarded its due. Here too economic activities are considered in detail, as are housing types and the fashionable or unfashionable neighbourhoods in which they were situated.

Within the section nineteenth and twentieth centuries he shows how the development of Cairo was held back by the granting of public utilities to foreign companies as concessions. The corresponding privileges granted to foreigners in the form of the Capitulations, overseen by the Mixed Tribunals, meant that it was only when the court of Mixed Tribunals were abolished in 1949 that Cairo received a municipal charter. I wonder, however, whether this backwardness might have had an unforeseen positive consequence, a delay in street widening à la Muhammad Ali, with its concomitant destruction of monuments.

Raymond's last chapter is entitled "the Nightmare of Growth." He does not sidestep the problems that growth has occasioned, but notes that the public service infrastructure no longer seems incapable of meeting the challenge. There is now perhaps a small cause for optimism — since the ten years in which the book was written, for the first time the population aged five years or younger is smaller than that aged 6-10.

The illustrations, as in the original French edition, are small and mostly of poor quality, although the line drawings from nineteenth century works such as the *Description* reproduce rather better on the matt paper. More importantly, a whole new series of maps were made for the book (and which have also been redrawn for this English edition) which greatly supplement existing medieval maps and which reproduce well as slides can serve as a useful teaching aid to courses on history and urban development.

The translation is fluent and imaginative, substituting "Preview" and "Retrospective", for instance, for Raymond's "Préambule" and "Conclusion" (although on p. 369 "Saroit" should be rendered as "Sarwat", and elsewhere "*odjaq*" as "*ojaq*").

The bibliography has not been brought up to date since the appearance of the original in 1993. To it should be added Nasser Rabbat's study of the citadel of



Cairo,<sup>2</sup> *The Cambridge History of Egypt*,<sup>3</sup> and a competitor, Max Rodenbeck's *Cairo: The City Victorious*.<sup>4</sup> In fact, though ostensibly a competitor, Rodenbeck's work is really aimed at a different audience, those who are encountering Cairo for the first time and who do not necessarily have any background knowledge of the region. Rodenbeck's is an engagingly written book that can be confidently recommended for the tourist, but for the audience reading this review, Raymond's book will long remain a classic of its kind.

ADAM SABRA, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Pp. 192.

REVIEWED BY BOAZ SHOSHAN, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

There are topics, as important as they may be, that for some reason cannot generate books. Adam Sabra's *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* is a case in point. It is a book in form but hardly in content. This regrettable observation stems from an unavoidable fact that Sabra should have been the first to recognize. That is, one cannot write a book on poverty and charity in medieval Islam, not even in Mamluk Egypt (as the subheading has it), when such sparse information is available. The result is that the book under review is a collection of discussions artificially stitched together, some of which are original, some less so.

Following a brief introduction, Chapter 2 promises to deal with poverty as a social reality and as a religious ideal. As it turns out, Sabra, handicapped by his sources, has much more to tell on the latter than on who and how one was poor in Mamluk Egypt. He gives us a sample of writings by Muslim thinkers—incidentally, none of whom was a medieval Egyptian—on the nexus of poverty and piety, and on the Sufi poor (*faqīr*, in itself an ambiguous term) and pious in particular. Thus, for the renowned al-Ghazzālī, adopting the "virtue" of poverty was a sign of contempt for this world. Yet, the sort of intellectual aloofness that appears in this scholar's views (something not quite obvious to Sabra, it appears) can be detected in al-Ghazzālī's definition that "all beings other than God are poor (or needy,

<sup>2</sup>Nasser O Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden, 1995).

<sup>3</sup>*The Cambridge History of Egypt. Vol.1: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*. ed. Carl F. Petry, *Vol. 2: Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M. W. Daly (Cambridge, 1998)

<sup>4</sup>Cairo, 2000.





*faqīr*), since they all depend on Him for the continuation of their existence" (p. 20). If the so-called ivory tower was ever in need of bad press, al-Ghazzālī provides it. Indeed, it is significant that in his categorization of the states of poverty, only one out of the five groups of the poor consists of "the hungry man who lacks bread or the naked man who lacks clothes." What a flexible definition of poverty does the master of medieval Islamic thought provide; how detached from social reality it is, where there are poor and "poor." Similarly, how ironic sounds the "espousal of poverty" as an attitude that "appealed even to the elites" (p. 30). One wonders how much consolation to the poor man's (and woman's) heart was al-Ghazzālī's quoting the Prophet to the effect that "no one is more virtuous than the pauper, if he is content" (p. 21).

Since Sabra's section on poverty as a religious ideal is basically a synopsis of some Sufi views, it appears quite ironic that al-Ghazzālī's opponent, the Hanbalite Ibn al-Jawzī, attacks the very basis of Sufi advocacy of poverty and stresses the negative side of poverty in that Sufi hallucinations are caused by hunger (p. 23). Some decades later, Ibn Taymīyah, a no less prominent Hanbalite, rejected the Sufi equation of piety with poverty. That an analysis of the sort that Sabra is engaged with here can easily slide from the terra incognita of the poor into the more familiar domain of the "poor" Sufis can be seen in the author's turning to the Sufi institution of the *khānqāh* and Egyptian Sufi orders (pp. 27–29). When, in the conclusion of the second chapter, Sabra anticipates the reader's confusion as to where poverty as a social phenomenon ends and poverty as a religious ideal begins, it seems only too easy to blame it on the "ambivalence inherent in the Mamluk sources." It is no astonishing news that the sources in question were not much concerned with the poor. The task of the social historian is, however, not to accept the smokescreen they put up in their insistent attempts to represent poverty as an intellectual-religious phenomenon. After all, as Sabra tells us, al-Ghazzālī believed that the poor should conceal their shameful status. It is the historian's task to expose the camouflage that was part of the intellectual enterprise.

With the notable exception of famine relief, there was no system of government-sponsored poor relief, and the Mamluk state left most acts of charity to individual initiative. Sabra opens up his third chapter with discussion of the legal aspects of the mandatory alms tax (*zakāh*). Here again, the synopsis of al-Ghazzālī's view epitomizes the practical marginality, not to say non-existence, of the poor in this context. For al-Ghazzālī's interest is in the conditions that a person paying the *zakāh* must fulfill. Thus the latter has to have the correct intention; or, the tax should be divided among the eight categories of recipients, provided they are present in the place where the tax is paid. The pauper is only in the role of an intermediary between the wealthy and God, a means to express devotion (pp. 37–38). When al-Ghazzālī comes to speak of the recipients, he begins ("interestingly



enough," according to Sabra, but "unsurprisingly" would seem to fit better) with the ascetics and the Sufis, then goes on to the pious, and only then comes to the conventional poor, so to speak. Here Sabra does not fail to critically observe how al-Ghazzālī identified the "deserving" poor and his emphasis on the Sufis in particular (p. 38). The extent to which al-Ghazzālī's detached discussion of alms was irrelevant to the Mamluk situation we learn from the fact that a state-sponsored alms distribution was abolished by the Mamluk period (p. 40).

When it comes to begging, al-Ghazzālī's disapproval is illuminating: by begging, one complains that God has not provided for one's livelihood (p. 42). Sabra notes correctly that al-Ghazzālī's prohibition of begging when one is able to subsist for a whole year has little connection to reality, since no beggar in Mamluk Cairo can have been so fortunate (p. 44). As with the *zakāh*, al-Ghazzālī's premium is rather on the benefactor, not the beggar: the former may give alms out of embarrassment, which presumably means not out of sincerity. Alternatively, he may be placed at the level of the Creator. If this indeed be the case, the beggar should refuse (pp. 42–43). The fourteenth-century al-Subkī appears no less cynical than al-Ghazzālī: he sees the street beggars as actually blessed by God, since He could have made them dumb or crippled, and thus unable even to plead for alms. The paupers are an embarrassment to al-Subkī and to the Muslim community as a whole. To the jurists, begging was not a subject of interest, while Sufi authors disapproved of begging and praised concealment of need instead. In Sufi circles, begging was considered as distracting one's attention from God. The kind of intellectual sport that the phenomenon stood for is reflected in the confession of one Baghdadi Sufi to have started begging as a means to overcome his own ego (p. 41). Here again, it is indicative of the treatment of beggars that to late medieval writers they are a "professional group," or a folkloric phenomenon, such as the *harāfīsh*, who use various tricks to attract almsgivers. Hence al-Subkī recommends their punishment (pp. 45–46). And Sabra himself looks for these "professionals" in medieval Arabic *belles lettres*, such as the *Qaṣīdat Banī Sāsān* or the *Maqāmāt* that served as entertainment for the elite (pp. 46–49), obviously unaware that what is at issue is an elitist manipulation of the acute problem of poverty into a sort of burlesque.

On actual begging in Mamluk Cairo we know next to nothing, but we know more on sporadic attempts by the government to regulate the beggars (pp. 60–1). No state program for almsgiving was developed; almsgiving for the paupers or the ill is sparsely recorded, mainly on the occasion of public celebrations, religious holidays, or funerals. Specific sultans, amirs, scholars, and others are mentioned in the sources as providing alms (pp. 50–58, 96–98). Thus the scant data suggest that almsgiving was basically a private affair (p. 68). The Mamluk state was satisfied in exercising supervision over orphans' property and intervening on behalf of debtors.



Chapter 4 deals with the institution of *waqf* as the most permanent form of charitable giving (pp. 69, 70). However, while we find information on the administration of these pious endowments, to a great extent already known, the role of *waqf* in the context of poverty and charity is marginal in the discussion. Here or there we learn that Sultan Qalāwūn, for example, arranged for sixty orphans to receive lessons in a complex he established (p. 75). The same ruler ordered that in an endowment he had arranged, poor and sick people were allowed to reside and receive treatment without payment (pp. 77–78). A rather revealing bit of information is that at least forty-six *waqfs* were established between 1300 and 1517 in Cairo to provide education to boys whose families could not pay for it, or to orphans (pp. 80–81). However, there is little evidence that the state or private individuals took much interest in housing for the poor and orphans (pp. 84, 85). By and large, until the mid-fifteenth century it was rare to find a *waqf* that takes care of feeding the poor (pp. 86–89). Sabra's calculation of about a thousand poor receiving food from *waqfs* illustrates the extreme marginality of the phenomenon in a city where the number of the poor was very much higher (p. 92).

Chapter 5, which is devoted to "standards of living," tells more, like its predecessor, about various aspects of late medieval Cairo than about the book's major theme. A case in point is the section on housing. The short section on clothing concludes with the unstartling statement that the poor people's clothing was simple and that they owned few items of it (p. 112). Also as regards food, it comes as no surprise that the poor were unable to consume meat (p. 114). The sort of quantitative section and the periodic breakdown of the standard of living that Sabra provides, or his attempt to figure out the effect of the Black Death in wage terms, do not add much to the vague idea that we already have. Were the poor among the wage-earners who benefited from the demographic decline? Was there a shortage of skilled labor, of the type for which the poor were usually not qualified?

Chapter 6 is an analysis of the dynamics of food shortages in Mamluk Egypt. This topic has been variously treated in recent scholarship, yet Sabra adduces further material that adds to our fair knowledge of the grain market mechanism. Here again, what we learn of the poor directly is relatively meager. On some occasions sultans and the military elite distributed food, but, as Sabra speculates, only about 15,000 Cairenes out of many more in need benefited on such occasions. On other occasions the poor were reduced even to cannibalism.

In conclusion, as a result of its informal character, much of Mamluk charity is hidden from the eye of the historian, which practically means that he will face difficulties writing about it. That almsgiving was an important social practice in Mamluk Cairo (p. 174) is a plausible guess, yet quite anti-climatic and too general



at the end of a book that promises to tackle the topic. Charity under the Mamluks was unsystematic and unorganized.

One final comment. Sabra begins his book by stating that the social history of the pre-modern Middle East is in its infancy and ties it to the scholarly lack of interest in it until recently. How recent is Sabra's "recently" is unclear, but such a statement seems now not only inaccurate but also disserviceable to the scholarly field of which Sabra is a member. Some decent social history of the pre-modern Middle East has been written since the late 1960s at the latest. In fact, given the grave problems of historical material of the sort which Sabra's own book demonstrates, the potential for the social history in question may be less than one would certainly wish.

TABĪQ AL-ASHRAFĪ AL-BAKLAMĪSHĪ, *Ghunyat al-Rāmī wa-Ghāyat al-Marāmī fī 'Ilm al-Ramy 'an al-Qaws*. Edited with notes by 'Abd al-Qādir al-Zāhirī ('Ammān: Dār 'Ammār lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 1998). Pp. 176, illustrations.

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This book is an edition of a text on archery by a Mamluk named Tabīq al-Ashrafī al-Baklamīshī al-Yunānī. Little is known of the author, apart from that he was a Mamluk of the sultan al-Ashraf Sha'bān (r. 764/1363-778/1377), and was a distinguished member of a group of Mamluks who completed their education at a military college, and were then sent to work in military workshops. This is the second edition of al-Baklamīshī's work, the first having been made by J. D. Latham and W. F. Paterson in 1970 from a manuscript located in Istanbul. For his edition, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Zāhirī relies primarily on a different manuscript, located in Aleppo.

Dealing as it does with archery, al-Baklamīshī's work falls into the genre of *furūsīyah* (horsemanship) literature. Despite its narrow literal meaning, the term *furūsīyah* covered a wide range of expertise that a Mamluk was expected to gain, including the use of various weapons, the training of horses and battle tactics. David Ayalon has extended the meaning to cover "all that a horseman had to master by systemic training in order to become an accomplished knight."<sup>1</sup> The Mamluk sultanate saw the production of a large number of manuals devoted to the

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<sup>1</sup>David Ayalon, "Notes on the Furusiyya Exercises and Games in the Mamluk Sultanate," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 9 (1961), 34.



subject,<sup>2</sup> of which this is one particularly specialized example.

After an introduction in which he discusses the merits of archery, al-Baklamīshī presents his reader with a *qaṣīdah* (poem) in which he discusses the subject. Then in the second part of his work, he gives a line-by-line explanation of most of the poem. He bases his discussion on six *uṣūl al-ramy* (sources of archery), these being positioning the body, loading, gripping the arrow, drawing, aiming and releasing. He then discusses a number of other matters, including shooting from horseback, stringing the bow (a seventh *aṣl*, according to some other mediaeval scholars, but not counted as such by al-Baklamīshī) and the qualities a student of archery should have. He also digresses into consideration of numerous other topics, including stringing the bow on horseback or when submerged up to the neck, illnesses common to archers, the effects of differences in the size and shape of the body on the archer's technique, and advice on ways to practice archery. As should by now be clear, al-Baklamīshī discusses his subject in painstaking detail. He illuminates his work with quotations from the Quran, legal texts, poetry and other masters of archery. A final digression on strength and courage finishes the original work, after which the name of the scribe (Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Tulwānī) and the date of copying (805/1402) are given. There then begins a new section that has been added to the original manuscript, although the authorship is unclear. The new section supplements the original work, adding further discussions of topics related to archery, including shooting from above or below the enemy, the use of crossbows and different types of arrows and the laws of conduct in battle.

The book ends with a glossary of terminology used to refer to various types of arrows, a conversion table of Damascene measurements to French (metric) and English (imperial) ones, a section giving statistical information on bows, twenty-one illustrations and a contents page. The illustrations provided in the book are useful aids to understanding of the text, although it is not made clear when they were added, as they do not seem to be contemporary. The text also refers the reader several times to illustrations that are either clearly not the ones intended or simply non-existent, which is slightly frustrating.

Al-Baklamīshī's text gives an interesting insight into the mind of a Mamluk who was a true master of his craft. Through his attempt to provide a "how to" guide for his peers, he reveals much about his own perceptions and attitudes. Naturally, one can not say how far his work reflects the actual practice of archery; indeed, it is much more likely that his work demonstrates his own view of how it *should* be practiced. However, it remains of interest to scholars of the period, particularly those studying Mamluk military theory and warfare.

<sup>2</sup>Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999), 437.

